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LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

APRIL
1992

MAR 11 REC'D

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Graduate Theological Union

Celebration!

For Growth in Faith and Mission

Cover meditation ♦♦

That December the days seemed shorter than ever: the below-zero temperatures had silenced my car's battery, making holiday errands and shopping a struggle.

So when the gift of some paper-white narcissus bulbs arrived, I was appreciative, but not anxious to take on indoor gardening as yet another chore. The bulbs were set aside in their box until mid-January, when plans were made to meet with the bulb-givers in February. I was struck with guilt and fear. Surely my friends would expect to see narcissus blooming. What if, while I'd procrastinated, the bulbs had gone bad?

The box was hauled out and the bulbs examined. To my urban eyes they did not look promising: like the forgotten onions I sometimes find in a corner of my kitchen, but knobbier, rougher, with a few sprouts emerging. I consulted with my mother, a woman who knows bulbs, and was persuaded to give them a try. Following instructions, I arranged the bulbs in the shallow clay dish provided, and patted a square of moss over the top.

By mid-February the weather had warmed enough for a really good blizzard; my guests never did arrive.

But the bulbs had done their part: narcissus bloomed in such bounty that they almost bent double, their white crowns too much for their slender stems.

Isn't that the way with God's grace: we bring our shallow dish of faith and in return receive love beyond measure, Christ's death for our sins—and with it, the gift of eternal life.

Grace comes to us whether or not we expect it, whether our faith is fragile or strong. God's extravagant love is so abundant that it cannot be used up, no matter how many emptied hearts it seeks to fill.

How can we understand such love? How many of us would rather keep our wintry souls, our lists of do's and don'ts, our martyr attitudes? How many of us would rather bear a cross than bear such love?

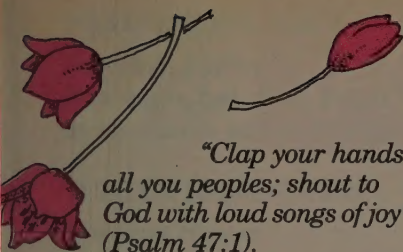
Yet spring after spring the paperwhites come, and the tulips, the daffodils and the lilies, their profusion of color and scent awakening our dormant papery hearts. May they encourage us this Easter to open ourselves to God's transforming grace and find the glorious new life Jesus has given us. ■

*Ann Harrington
Production Editor*

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*"Clap your hands,
all you peoples; shout to
God with loud songs of joy"
(Psalm 47:1).*

Both Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Woman Today are taking his joyous directive from the psalmist to heart. Women of the ELCA is launching a year-long celebration to mark its fifth year, under the theme "Gifted for Every Good Purpose," culminating in a "birthday bash" at the Second Triennial Convention in Washington, D.C., in August 1993. Don't miss the very special birthday kit (p. 45).

LWT rejoices in God's blessings with this, our 50th issue. Crafting it has been stimulating, difficult, rewarding, tiring. Don't let the hand-clapping of the psalmist fool you: there are some tough, hand-wringing issues here too. For instance, how does one celebrate Easter joy "in the midst of" pain, limitations, death (see Kristine Carlson-Wee, p. 4, and Barbara Lundblad, p. 8)? How do we really feel about people who show up for church only at Christmas and Easter (see "Welcome Me Back," p. 8)?

But do take part in the hand-clapping. The issue does: In articles about a child with Down syndrome and a clown ministry (p. 32), about how we celebrate boldly and in community (pp. 10 and 12), about "subtle reminders" that speak of God's hidden surprises (p. 31).

Some readers may find their

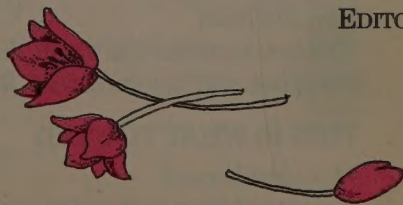
thoughts reflected in "Readers Celebrate LWT's 50th Issue" (p. 40). Here are favorite issues and articles of LWT's first four years, plus comments about LWT, faith, life, God. We LWT readers are a varied lot—and God values us all!

Last month's poignant story on AIDS, "What Will You Do?", is given closure in "This Is What You Did" (p. 25) by the same author, now freed to reveal her identity. Indeed, our psalmist would be clapping. Tom McGrath in "What's So Funny About Church?" (p. 15) explores—with taste and finesse—the role of humor and the faith. Indeed, our psalmist would be laughing.

Finally, Karen Melang ("The Wedding," p. 6), reveals how Jesus, in "the wine sign" at the Wedding at Cana, means to give us "not only the absence of evil, but the presence of delight." The miracle tells us that in Christ's kingdom celebrations are not luxuries, but the heart of life—a foretaste of the feast to come, when it will be clear that it is Jesus we have been celebrating all along. Indeed, our psalmist would be overwhelmed with joy. May we be also. ■

Nancy J. Stelling

EDITOR



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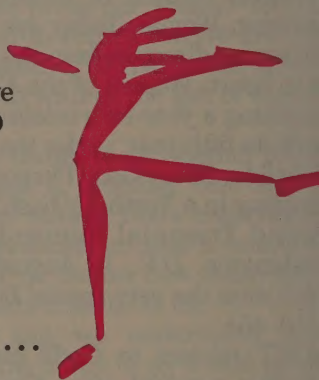
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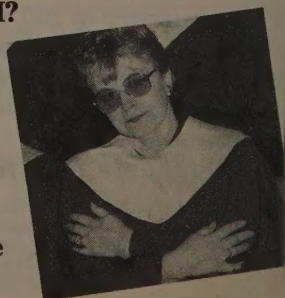
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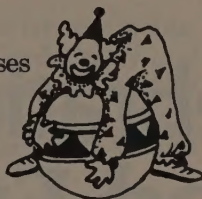
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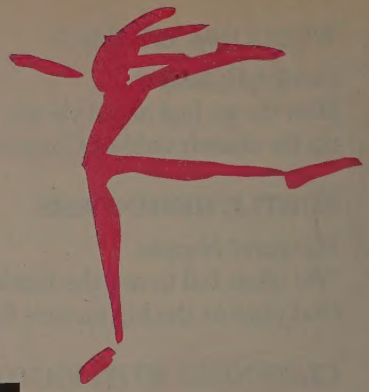
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Celebrating Good Friday and Easter

Kristine Carlson-We

"We sing with joy in our hearts to thee, O Lord. . . ."

It was Christmastime, and the choir, celebrating Jesus' birth, sang this song based on Psalm 92. The song moved me deeply. And I thought: how we yearn for these words to be true for us. How we yearn to sing to God with joy in our hearts. To sing, not as we often do with sorrow or despair, doubt or fear, but to sing with joy. Sometimes we sing with joy. But so often we find ourselves singing with troubled hearts.

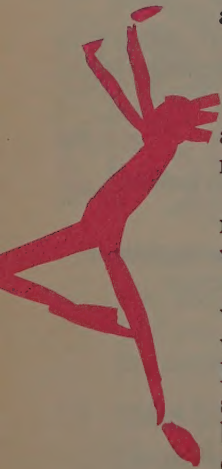
We are often like Mary at the Annunciation. Hearing the angel's words about the conception and birth of the Son of God. Mary's first response is not to sing with joy. In truth she is troubled (Luke 1:29), troubled in her heart—just as we often are.

Now it is Eastertime, and celebrating Jesus' resurrection we sing: "This joyful Eastertide, Away with sin and sorrow! My love, the Crucified, Has sprung to life this morn'g" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 149).

Once again, we yearn for these words to be true for us. No more sin or sorrow, for Jesus, our love, has died and risen. We want to celebrate. We want the joy.

Yet again we often have troubled hearts. Perhaps someone we love has died, or betrayed us, or left us. Or life is so hurried we can't happily live it. Or despair and loneliness haunt us. Perhaps the suffering of others disturbs us. Perhaps our own suffering shadows our days. We want to be joyful and celebrate, but the sin and sorrow of life temper, even overwhelm, our joy.

Such questions troubled me some years ago when I lost a child in a miscarriage. In the days afterward the loss felt great



and the capricious power of evil death enormous. What could ever contain it? During that time, a friend called. Years earlier, he had lost a baby to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. At the end of our conversation, my friend said to me, "Remember that the psalmist sings: 'Weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning. . . . Now you sit in sackcloth, but you will dance again'" (See Psalm 30:5-11).

How could my friend say such a thing? It is because of Easter. Even more precisely, it is because of Good Friday and Easter that we can celebrate *with troubled hearts in a troubled world*: for Good Friday and Easter tell us that Jesus reigns, not only over the life of Easter, but over the death of Good Friday.

In his crucifixion, Jesus knew suffering and death. But they were not the end for him. Jesus broke loose and arose from their powers to establish an even greater power: life. Not life that is separate from death. Not life that is ignorant of death. But a life that knows and includes death—and is not vanquished by it.

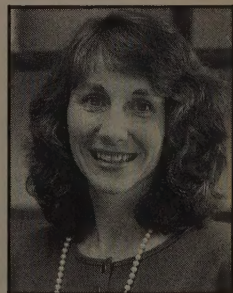
We who follow Jesus and celebrate his resurrection can dance, because of Jesus' work for us on Good Friday and Easter.

A watercolor by a family friend hangs in our living room. It is a painting of Montana mountains. When I bought it, I learned that the artist had painted it while a good friend was dying of cancer. Each day she'd visit her friend in the hospice, then go home to paint.

The mountains in the painting are blue, and they brood in the background. But enormous as they are, they are not what dominates the picture. Rather the dance of mountain flowers across the painting is what catches the eye and holds the viewer: pink monkey flowers, yellow blowing sunflowers, blue lantanas, pink lady's slippers, yellow daisies, purple irises. Such wildflowers dance boldly with life across this mountain scene. It is their life that is the real story of this watercolor.

This Easter, even should life be hard, we who follow Jesus can celebrate. We can dance and let the world know why. For Jesus knows our sin and sorrow. But enormous as they are, it is life in Jesus Christ, for now and forever, that is the enduring story. ■

Fristine Carlson-Wee is associate director of contextual education at Luther Northwestern Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. The mother of three sons, she lives in Northfield, Minnesota, where her husband, Morris Wee, serves as pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church. She wrote the 1988 LWT Bible study on Mark.



The Wedding

Karen Melang

Celebrating isn't always easy. Ask anyone who has planned a child's birthday party, or a family reunion or any wedding. Party planners will tell you about the many things that can go wrong.

Sometimes poor planning is the culprit; but other times we watch, open-mouthed and unbelieving, as events that we cannot control unfold. The four-year-olds finish their games in eight minutes and demolish the cake, and there are still two long hours to go. The reunion picnic is rained out, despite the sunny forecast, and 57 relatives take cover at your house. The groom faints not once, not twice, but three times before he gets to "I do!" Or the refreshments give out.

Like so many celebrations, the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) threatened to become a catastrophe. How Mary knew the wine was gone we don't know. Maybe everyone knew. Maybe the bride's or groom's mother approached Mary with horror in her eyes and the bad news on her lips. Mary went straight to Jesus.

Jesus is quick to do what God often does when we wait for something *right now*. "My hour is not yet come," Jesus says, reminding Mary and us that God's schedule is not the same as ours.

Mary, not put off, trusts that Jesus will act, and directs the servants to do whatever he tells them. Obeying Jesus' commands, the servants fill the water jars and then draw out a sample for the steward in charge of the feast.

The steward is thrilled with the fine quality of this new wine, though he does not know where it comes from or how new it is. He scolds the groom for serving

the inferior wine first and saving the best for last.

In the transformation of the water into wine, St. John tells us we have the first sign that, in Jesus, God is coming to us.

Why is rescuing a wedding reception from ruin and

Jesus means to give us,
the wine sign says, not only
the absence of evil, but
the presence of delight.



ts from humiliation the first thing on Jesus' agenda? rely there were more important things to fix. Why not t tackle leprosy or hunger or sick children? But Jesus prises us all by saving not a sick or dying person, but an endangered celebration.

Jesus' choice is not insignificant or haphazard. When us turns ordinary water into superb wine, he gives us a ble of God's lavish extravagance. Yes, the blind will see, lame will walk, the dead will rise, but that's only the inning. Jesus means to give us, the wine sign says, not y the absence of evil, but the pres- e of delight.

This first sign of Jesus tells us that ebrations are not the frills of life ich we can do without. They are not uries. Celebrations are the heart of , the markers of our days, times to or—in boisterous, or quietly con- ted ways—the gifts that come to us n God's hand.

We celebrate birth over and over rdy, Lordy, look who's 40!"). We cry any rate, I do), at the awesome mys- y of new birth, the trickles of baptis- l water on tiny heads. We praise the work and perse- ance that mark promotions, graduations and irements. We toast years of faithful love, amazed at those o hold hands and trust God's care through whatever the ades bring. We use the red "Today's Your Special Day" te for math tests passed, presentations made, and driv- permits received.

All celebrations—even the flawed ones—are signs that God's own time, the plain water of our existence is be- nning fine wine. Imperceptibly, through the experiences our years, through the relationships we get and choose, ough the work we set our hands and minds to, through ersity and joy, Jesus is transforming us just as surely he did the water at Cana.

Each celebration, and most especially the Eucharist, is o a "foretaste of the feast to come." At the heavenly nquet, there will be no more running out of wine, or ything else. Nothing will go wrong. Christ will be the st, and we will finally know what we have been cel- rating all along.

ren Melang, trained as a deaconess at Valparaiso iversity (Valparaiso, Indiana), is a communicator at iversity of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and mother of two children, ages 14 and 17.

Celebrations are the heart of life, the markers of our days, times to savor—the gifts that come to us from God's hand.





Celebrating in the Midst of...

Barbara K. Lundblad

**The Daughters of Jacob
Home sits high on a
hill in the South Bronx.
It perches like a castle**

overlooking a neighborhood once filled with synagogues, now boarded up or turned into Pentecostal churches. I check in at the front desk. Room 608A, I write in the log. It is Beulah's room, her home now after a childhood in the Virgin Islands and years supervising the lunchroom in a Bronx public school.

I push the button for the sixth floor; I know it is unlikely that Beulah will be in her room. I usually find her in the hallway, sitting alone or talking with her friend Elsie. Her walker is always beside her chair, draped with the "saddle bag" that carries her possessions.

Beulah always greets me with unabandoned joy. And we are never far into conversation

before Beulah says, "Oh, pastor, I could never go on without Him. You know what I say everyday," (and I do by now) ... "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Her walker is there, silent testimony to the reality that Beulah hasn't run for years. Yet she proclaims the presence of the God who empowers her to mount up on wings ... even with her walker.

Beulah has taught me what it means to celebrate "in the midst of." Perhaps such lessons come most powerfully from those whose lives have been interrupted. (Indeed, I stole the word from *An Interrupted Life*, the letters and journal of Etty Hillesum, published after her death in an Auschwitz concentration camp at age 29.) One bleak winter day, in the midst of the German occupation of her Netherlands home, Etty wrote:

"The jasmine behind my house has been completely ruined by the rains and storms of the last few days, its wh

ossoms are floating about in
uddy black pools on the low
rage roof. But somewhere in-
de me the jasmine continues
blossom undisturbed. . . .
nd it spreads its scent round
e House in which You dwell,
a God. You can see, I look after
ou, I bring You not only my
ars and my forebodings on
his stormy, grey Sunday
orning, I even bring You
ented jasmine. . . . I shall try
make You at home always."^{7*}

Of late, my most passionate
achers are men and women
iving with AIDS, with lives far
o young to be interrupted. In
ecember I preached at an in-
rfaith service of hope and re-
embrance planned by a co-
ition of Jewish, Muslim and
hristian people concerned
out AIDS. Three witnesses
oke: two young men who
ave AIDS and Mildred Pear-
on, founder of Mothers' Love,
hose son died of AIDS. I
urned to "Beulah's chapter,"
aiah 40: "A voice cries out: 'In
e wilderness prepare the
ay of the Lord, make straight
the desert a highway for our
od' " (verse 3). Isaiah is very
ear here: *In the wilderness*
prepare the way of the Lord. IN
the wilderness. Do not wait un-
til the promised land.

At the close of the service,
en and women living with
IDS and those diagnosed as
IV positive were invited to
me forward. There were too
any—and all were too young.
eir lives are tragically inter-
rupted. They turned to the con-
egation with the benediction:
"May the Holy One bless you
and keep you," they said to us.

"May the Holy One bless you
and keep you," we answered
back. And I thought of Beulah,
by then lying in her bed, her
walker also at rest. She had cel-
ebrated another day, running
without growing weary. I
thought of Etty Hillesum's jas-
mine flowers and how she of-
fered everything up to the God
who dwells within.

**"Somewhere inside me the
jasmine continues to blossom
undisturbed.... And it spreads
its scent round the House in
which You dwell, oh God."**

Then, the last line of the ben-
ediction hit me afresh. Women
and men, living and dying,
blessed me and I blessed them,
each of us with the same
words: "May the Holy One look
upon you kindly and give you
peace."

There we were, in the wil-
derness, preparing the way of
the Lord. Not waiting for a bet-
ter time or soundness of health.
Not postponing the blessing
until we reached the promised
land.

We were learning to cele-
brate in the midst of. . . ■

*The Rev. Barbara Lundblad,
pastor at Our Savior's Atone-
ment, New York City, is a
speaker on "The Protestant
Hour" radio ministry. Pastor
Lundblad wrote the lead arti-
cle, "Tied Together," in the first
issue of LWT, January 1988.*

^{*}From *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1914-1943* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). Reprinted by permission of Jonathan Cape, Ltd. and Uitgeverij Balans.

Celebrating Community

M. Wyvetta Bullock

As the organ begins to sound the inviting rhythm of "I Am Glad for the Cross," the congregation rises and joins the choir in singing; music fills the sanctuary. The procession has begun and the whole congregation begins to worship. Bethel Lutheran Church is alive. The processional hymn sets the tone for the congregation's worship experience, and it is one of thanksgiving and praise.

Bethel Lutheran is an African-American congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Chicago's West Side. Similar scenes could easily be taken from many other African-American congregations. The faith and life of Christians in North America who are of African descent is characterized by joy and hope in the midst of struggle and pain. We have learned to celebrate the presence of God even when it would appear that God is not present.

An observer of our worship will quickly recognize the importance of music. The music allows, even begs, participation. The familiar rhythms and words of our life story connect us with our ancestors, each other, the Christian community, and God. So whether the choir, a soloist or the congregation is singing, almost everyone participates and adds their "yes" and "amen" to the hymn.

One might wonder, what is at the root of our rejoicing? Obviously, we share the same root as all Christians, Jesus Christ. Perhaps the expression of our faith in Jesus is more demonstrative because of our need for Jesus. Since arriving on this continent, African-Americans have been in a struggle for survival. Our foreparents knew one friend, Jesus. So when we gather as a worshiping community, we gather to celebrate that "God has brought us this far along the way." When we come together as God's people, we gather as a community of hope.

For the past several years I have witnessed at Bethel what God can do in the midst of a community that unites around word and sacrament, then lives out its faith. We bring hope when drugs, crime and unemployment are all around us. Where there is death, through the eyes of faith, we see new life. Where there is destruction, we see restoration. By God's

pace we believe we can make a difference in our neighborhood. Our community life is not limited to the members of our congregation but extends to the people we encounter.

Working and worshipping together, we find determination to build a Christ-centered life for ourselves and our children. We believe God will bring a "change to come" and a time of deliverance. African-American Christians have often related their journey to that of the people of God in the Old Testament. The deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt is seen as particularly relevant to our

North American story. Jesus is our deliverer, as well as savior and Lord. Jesus liberates us not only from sin but from the bondage of unjust systems. We believe God is at work in our lives and in our community. As the noted Black theologian James Cone says in *Speaking the Truth* (Pardmans, 1986): "The 'Glory, Hallelujah' at the end of the spiritual 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen' was not a denial of trouble but a faith affirmation that trouble does not have the last word on Black existence. It means that . . . Jesus is also present with them, fighting against trouble."

The struggles of the members of our community are not unlike those of others. The community has issues related to family, education, health, employment and time. We do not deny the presence of evil, we just do not give it precedence over the presence of God.

So when that organ begins to sound the chords to "I'm Glad for the Cross," we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, because in it we see freedom in its fullest sense. By God's immeasurable grace, the joy of the Lord is our strength for another day. ■

Wyvetta Bullock, a member of Bethel Lutheran Church, works in the Division for Congregational Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is co-host of MOSAIC, the ELCA's video magazine, and is studying for her Master of Divinity degree at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



Parishioners at Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago celebrate the Eucharist together.





Celebrate Boldly

Gladys G. Moore

Whenever I think of praising
God freely and uninhibitedly
I think of Mother Thomas

Mother Thomas was one of the "nurses" at John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Detroit, Michigan, where she grew up. The nurses had been trained in CPR and first aid by the Red Cross, and they were responsible for attending to anyone who needed special care—the faint, the weary, the infirm, both young and old.

Mother Thomas was always dressed in her white nurse's uniform, complete with white cap and navy-blue cape. But more striking than her uniform was her enthusiastic worship. Often Mother Thomas would be *filled with the Spirit*, as my mother used to explain to my brother and me. And what would begin with feet lightly tapping the floor would end with Mother Thomas joyously striding down the center aisle giving thanks to God in motions and moans that were appreciated by all, though understood by few. At John Wesley A.M.E. Zion, Mother Thomas was at home. She was loved and admired for her faithfulness as well as for her ability to move, literally, with the Spirit of God.

But I wonder sometimes how welcome Mother Thomas would feel if she came to one of our Lutheran churches today. If her feet started tapping during worship in one of our congregations, would judgmental frowns turn her way?

It is a mysterious matter, the worship of God, a mysterious and holy matter. And while the four

Our Lutheran liturgy in many of our churches may seem sedate and stoic, our feelings about our worship life are anything but quiet and serene. For because our worship life is the center of our gathered life, we do not like to have it tampered with.

How, then, can we as Lutheran Christians learn to open ourselves up more to God's Spirit, and to incarnate that which we so boldly declare in our worship services week after week? And perhaps even more to the point: How can we create a climate of worship in our congregations that allows for a variety of worship expressions—from shouting to silence—without polarizing people and without losing the richness and the distinctiveness of our Lutheran liturgy?

While I have no definitive answers to such questions, here are a few possible paths for reflection and discussion as we seek to make our worship more festive and more relevant to the needs of contemporary Christians.

First, think about what it is like to attend live concerts and theatrical performances. When our favorite musicians and actors have entertained us to the fullest, we can hardly contain our delight. Indeed, as their performances conclude, we often jump to our feet with thunderous applause and numerous accolades: **Bravo! Encore! More! More!**

While our liturgy, hymns, sermons, and other musical offerings are not performances, is it inappropriate for us to express our joy and gratitude for that which God has done for us with verbal responses such as "Amen!" or with

occasional rounds of applause? Can the rhythmic rubrics of gladdened hearts direct us into new and exciting ways of giving thanks to God for the great things God has done?

Think of the enthusiastic responses of sports fans as they watch their favorite teams play. It is a rare spectator who stays seated when the favored team scores a point or wins a game.

It is a mysterious matter,
our worship of God,
a mysterious and
holy matter.

Can we who gather week after week to celebrate the victory over sin and death that God has won for us through Jesus Christ . . . can we be content to acknowledge this victory only with our heads? Or is it possible, when we sing that great liturgical party song "This Is the Feast" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 81), that we can sing it with such confidence that our bodies get involved too? Do we really believe that our whole liturgical drama is one of celebration and freedom? One that feeds us and frees us to be the people of God in the world?

If we do, then we need to show it—with our hearts, minds, and bodies. As I travel throughout the congregations in my synod, more and more I find people longing for renewal in worship; for powerful preaching and moving music; for a message about the God who is with us, and who has promised to be with us always, to the close of the age.

Perhaps, as we seek to celebrate our faith more boldly, what we need more than anything is permission: permission to be who we are—in all our diversity and complexity—as the redeemed children of God. Maybe we need permission to confess that change makes us afraid that we might lose the church as we know it. Maybe we need permission to let go of our fears and to embrace something new. We need to know that it is okay to feel uncomfortable with actions and expressions that we don't understand; but that it's *not okay* to judge that which is different as being somehow deficient.

And finally, we may need permission to live with a certain amount of ambiguity, to live in the “in-between times,” when things are changing and we are changing, but when we have not yet caught up with ourselves. We need permission to be with each other, in the same way that God has chosen to be with us: to get to know one another better—across racial, regional, class, and cultural lines. Then we will more clearly reflect the God of love and grace who comes to us in Christ Jesus.

The Rev. Gladys Moore is an assistant to the bishop of the New Jersey Synod in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A singer and songwriter, Pastor Moore has composed over 60 songs and hymns.



I learned how to celebrate boldly at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church (Mahtomedi, Minnesota). began when John Carlson, the youth pastor, hatched a plan to welcome Pastor and Mrs. Eigenfeld home from a trip to the Holy Land.

“During the post-communion canticle ‘Thank the Lord and sing his praise,’” John instructed our congregation, “we are going to SHOUT the word *shouts* . . . like this: ‘He recalls his promises and leads his people forth in joy with SHOUTS of thanksgiving. Alleluia.’”

Our first attempts were self-conscious, but with every Sunday our shouts became bolder. We learned that we really could shout for joy in church! Finally the Eigenfelds returned. The look of sheer joy on their faces as we vigorously SHOUTED during the post-communion canticle must have tickled God. It sure tickled us. So we kept on shouting, every Sunday. Little shouts still come out of my mouth, no matter where I'm worshipping.

—Cynthia Mickels



What's **So Funny** About Church?

Tom McGrath

Did you hear the one about the minister, the priest, and the rabbi? If you did, you probably didn't hear it in church.

Unfortunately, humor and church life often don't mix. It's not that religious people can't have a sense of humor. Some of the funniest people I know are people I've met at church. And, if you're lucky, you'll occasionally hear an amusing anecdote from the pulpit or a good quip from a fellow choir member. But these are all "sides," throwaway lines.

It seems a change comes over people when it comes to anything religious. Humor is suspect. It's as if the laughable, the uproarious, and even the mildly amusing have little place in church or in religious life. Ha! That's laughable!

It's not that I think Sunday services should sound like the laugh track to "Hee Haw." What I'm suggesting is that humor be given sanctuary and that laughter be seen as an appropriate religious response to the good news.

Laughter comes naturally when you've been rescued from a fate truly worse than death.

I'll admit there may be a few sound reasons for the separation of church and the state of hilarity. For one thing, senses of humor vary. Some people giggle and titter while deciphering humorous passages from Shakespeare; others snort and

snicker through "The Honeymooners." Trying to inject a note of humor in as mixed a crowd as you'll find in a congregation can be risky. While the guy in the third row is guffawing, you can be sure someone else in the church is mentally crafting a stern letter of rebuke to be sent to the pastor, with copies to all members of the church council.

And people aren't always in the mood for humor when they come to worship. Often, people arrive at church with their souls wrestling with life's burdens. Forced jollity would seem cruel and mocking.

And there's a concern about what type of humor is appropriate in church. As Conrad Hyers writes in his collection of essays on humor and faith, *Holy Laughter* (Seabury Press, 1969), "[There's an] element of profanity inherent in all laughter with respect to holy things." This meeting of the sacred and profane can be upsetting to some. Cracking jokes isn't likely your first impulse when feeling awe in the presence of God. (That is, unless you're one of those people who spew one-liners in the face of fear.)

Yet despite these valid reasons to be cautious about when and how humor belongs in church life, I think there are a few compelling reasons that demand we find ways to welcome humor in our worship, catechism, and fellowship.

1. Life is funny.

Why bring only half of yourself to church? Hyers, again in *Holy Laughter*, describes human existence as a "running interplay between seriousness and laughter." Typically we in the church overemphasize the serious, which may be why young people find church so boring. Look around. Comedy clubs are booming. Mean-

while, church attendance is down. People shouldn't have to check the sense of humor at the church door.

2. The message of salvation is joyful.

A friend of mine who is a recovering alcoholic told me about the first time she attended an AA meeting. She walked down a hallway toward a room where people were laughing and joking. I figured I had the wrong place. How could end-of-the-road drunks be so happy?" She came to learn that laughter comes naturally when you've been rescued from a fate truly worse than death. Shouldn't recovering sinners experience the same joy of being redeemed?

3. We need to check our image of ourselves.

A great test of sanity is the ability to laugh gently at ourselves. The danger in taking ourselves and our particular religious vision too seriously is very real. After all, I come from the tradition responsible for the Inquisition. Talk about a group of people who lacked a sense of humor!

Hyers says, "Religious expression functions within a delicate dialectic [tension] between faith and laughter. On the one side is the peril of idolatry; on the other side is the peril of cynicism." I believe laughter can provide a moment of grace that frees us to see ourselves as we are. We'll never be perfect—not as the heavenly Father is perfect. But if we can break up laughing we may better avoid breaking down in despair, or cracking up from our own rigidity.

4. We need to check our image of God.

Holy Laughter includes an essay titled "The Humor of Christ," by Elton

Trueblood. According to Trueblood, "We have often developed a false pattern of Christ's character. . . . we habitually think of him as mild in manner, endlessly patient, grave in speech, and serious almost to the point of dourness" (from *The Humor of Christ*, Harper & Row, 1964). Trueblood argues that a fresh reading of the gospels would dispel these commonly held perceptions. In fact, he found much humor in Jesus' approach to those he debated and those he loved. But often, the apostles just didn't get the joke. And maybe sometimes we don't either.

I asked Bruce Buursma, an astute observer of the religious scene for many years, whether he found much humor among religious people. He laughed and said, "No. People take religion far more seriously than God does."

There's a major difference between taking something humorously and taking it lightly. And there's something about being too pious to laugh that seems like a lack of faith in the goodness of God's creation. As author John Powell, S.J., has often said, "If the good news that God loves you has reached your heart, please transform your face." ■

Tom McGrath is executive editor of U.S. Catholic magazine and president of the associated Church Press. He is married with two daughters who, he says, think my jokes are corny."



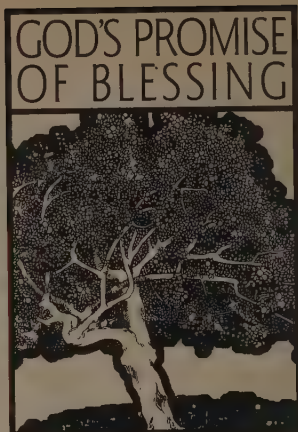
God, we believe, accepts us . . . unconditionally, warts and all. Laughter is the purest form of our response to God's acceptance of us. For when I laugh at myself I accept myself and when I laugh at other people in genuine mirth I accept them. Self-acceptance in laughter is the very opposite of self-satisfaction or pride. For in laughter I accept myself not because I'm some sort of super-person, but precisely because I'm not. There is nothing funny about a super-person. There is everything funny about a man who thinks he is. In laughing at my own claims to importance or regard I receive myself in a sort of loving forgiveness which is an echo of God's forgiveness of me. In much conventional contrition there is a selfishness and pride which are scarcely hidden. In our desperate self-concern we blame ourselves for not being the super-persons we think we really are. But in laughter we sit light to ourselves. That is why laughter is the purest form of our response to God.

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Session 4

The Glory of His Death

Judith A. VanOsdol-Hansen
Robert J. LaRiviere



Bible Basis: Matthew 16:1-28; 26:69—27:61

Study Text: Matthew 26:69—27:61

This is the second of two studies (Sessions 3 and 4) on Jesus' passion according to the gospel of Matthew. We will trace the story from Peter's denial through the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Renew us with the power of your cross, O Lord. Take away our pride and bondage to sin. Renew and strengthen our faith in you and our service to your people. Amen.

Understanding the Word

Read 26:69-75. Three times Jesus prays in the garden for the will of God to be done (verses 36-46). Even though Jesus has singled out Peter and has given him a stern warning (verses 40-41), Peter falls asleep. Soon after this, he denies Jesus three times. In the past, Peter's mistakes arose from a zeal and desire to protect his Lord. In verses 69-75, however, Peter wants to protect himself from suffering the same fate as Jesus.

Then, recognizing his failure, Peter is overwhelmed with sorrow (verse 75). Look up Matthew 10:33. According to those words of Jesus, Peter has sealed his fate: he deserves to have Jesus deny him before the Father in heaven.

In his grief, Peter can only see himself as condemned. As yet, he does not know the power of the cross to forgive sinners. As

...t, he does not comprehend Jesus' promise to rise from death and appear to him in Galilee (26:32). Peter has no hope.

1

What kind of person is Peter? Can you identify with him? Why or why not? What does Peter's denial teach you about your own faith and the faith of others?

Read 27:1-2. The power to carry out a sentence of death belongs to the Roman authorities. The chief priests and elders succumbed in their plot to convict Jesus of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Now they have to convince Pilate, a politician not concerned with blasphemy, that Jesus is dangerous and must die for the good of the state. To make his appearance fit the accusation, Jesus is bound, tied up like a criminal.

Read verses 3-10. Only Matthew tells of Judas' recognition of his crime and his suicide. Verse 3 says Judas "repented and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders." Apparently, Judas wants Jesus to stand trial, not be sentenced to death. When he sees what he has set in motion, he knows it is too late to call things back.

2

There is no question of the chief priests' and elders' deceit and disregard for the law of God (except when it serves their purposes). According to their law, if an accuser confesses to false testimony, the accused must be given a new trial or set free, and the accuser put to trial. Yet note how the chief priests and elders respond to Judas' confession in verse 4. What does this tell us about the fairness of Jesus' trial?

Look again at verses 3-10. This account connects Judas' death with a cemetery for foreigners in Jerusalem. What value, if any, does the account of Judas' death have for the Christian faith?



3

Compare the reactions of Peter (26:69-75) and Judas (27:3-10) when each recognizes his sin. Is Jesus' blood of the covenant (26:28) offered for the forgiveness of all sinners? Even Judas?

■ **Read 27:11-14.** Jesus knows that the religious authorities and the people have hardened their hearts against him, choosing not to see who he is. When Pilate later has the phrase "King of the Jews" written on a sign over the cross (verse 37), he means something quite different than the suffering servant king that is Jesus. Yet what he says, and later will write, is true in a way Pilate cannot imagine. He is amazed when Jesus does not defend himself.

■ **Read verses 15-26.** Pilate senses Jesus' innocence and the "jealousy" of his accusers (verse 18), and asks the crowd to choose who should live and who should die. Both prisoners are named *Jesus*. The crowd welcomes the "notorious prisoner," giving their blessing to evil and shouting their curse against the righteous one (verses 22-23). The greatest irony is that Pilate's wife—a "pagan" woman, to whom God came in a dream—declares Jesus to be innocent (verse 19).

Unable to control the crowds, Pilate declares his innocence in connection with the death of Jesus, washes his hands of Jesus' blood, releases Barabbas, and delivers Jesus to be crucified.

4

The crowd accepts full responsibility, as we see in verse 25. Sadly, and contrary to the spirit of Christ, this verse has often been used to flame the fires of anti-Semitism. What do you think is a responsible interpretation of verse 25? Do you see yourself in the story of Jesus' passion? If so, what is your role? If someone suggested to you that one particular group of people were (or are) responsible for Jesus' death, how would you respond?

5

How do you suppose Pilate knows that it is jealousy or envy that motivates the chief priests and elders to seek Jesus' death (see verse 18)? How is it that envy sends Jesus to the cross? How serious a sin is envy?

Read verses 27-44. "The whole cohort," or battalion (verse 27), would have been about 500 people that surround and mock Jesus. All human dignity is stripped from him; he allows himself to be helpless in the face of world's powers (verses 27-31).

As the condemned prisoner drags his cross through the crowd taunting onlookers, the soldiers "compel" a foreigner to help him (verse 32). Jesus' disciples do not come to his assistance. Instead, a man is forced into service by the authority of the soldiers.

6

The act of crucifixion is barely mentioned in the Matthew account, and is told in the past tense in verse 35. Why do you suppose the gospel gives so little detail about the actual crucifixion? Through the centuries, Christians have contemplated the crucifixion (the image of the crucified Jesus) as an act of devotion. Is such contemplation meaningful for you? Why or why not?

Mockery surrounds the event that brings salvation to the world: the wine mixed with gall (verse 34); the sign they put over Jesus' head (verse 37); the derision by the two criminals surrounding him (verse 44), and by those who pass by (verses 39-40); and the challenge of the chief priests and scribes (verses 41-43).



7

Why is mockery such a strong element in the story of Jesus' passion? What does this

say about what may happen when we take up our crosses?

8

Read verses 45-56. In verse 46 Jesus shouts, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Here Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1. Read Psalm 22. How could this psalm be applied to Jesus' death? In what verses does the psalmist express faith in God? Note that Jesus' words in Matthew 27:46 are a cry of agony and of hope at the same time. The sense of abandonment by God is very real for Jesus, as it was for the psalmist in Psalm 22. But hope is not lost.

Mockery and suffering did not silence the praises of the psalmist or the victory of the Son of God on the cross. That victory comes the moment of his death. The veil that hides the glory of God from all but a select few is torn from the temple. The power of God's reign is revealed (Matthew 27:51-54). What begins with mockery ends in a confession of faith (see verse 54).

Matthew points out that the women followers of Jesus were "looking on from a distance" (verses 55-56).

How is their role at the crucifixion related to their role both during Jesus' ministry and, later on, at the tomb?

Read verses 57-61. Joseph, a "rich man" and a "disciple," claims the body of Jesus. Joseph uses money and perhaps influence to secure Jesus' body.

9

Note Jesus' body is laid in Joseph's tomb. To see how this image of the tomb has been used in the songs of the church, look at "My Song Is Love Unknown" (Lutheran Book

Worship 94). In stanza 6 the hymn says "Heaven was his home; but mine the tomb wherein he lay." What do you think the hymn writer is trying to say here? In what sense do you think the burial of Jesus was "for you"?

Interpreting the Word

We interpret things based on what we know or believe to be true. The same two people can see very different "truth" in the same event. A television movie about General George Custer's campaign against Sitting Bull was narrated by two people: Custer's wife and an Oglala Sioux woman who, as a young girl, hid in the brush and witnessed Custer massacre her family and her tribe. The two stories that described the event were highly different. Likewise, our perception of Jesus' suffering and death affects our understanding of the resurrection. Faith in Jesus' resurrection in turn affects our whole approach to the Scriptures and the Christian life.

Consider the strange, paradoxical blessings of the Beatitudes. Jesus makes many references to them in his ministry. The cross and resurrection of Christ, however, reveal the truths of the Beatitudes in all their power. On the other hand, when gold plating covers the blood on the cross, the Beatitudes are trivialized into recipes for happiness.

The whole passion narrative reveals God's power to bring forgiveness and renewal to broken, helpless, undeserving people. Without this power of God, religion becomes a list of "dos and don'ts": do right and be righteous; think right and be a success; do wrong and be condemned; think wrong and be a failure.

When the Christian faith is turned into legalism, moralism, or positive thinking, it merely returns to the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. The cross breaks through all human claims upon God and shows us that God has made a claim of love upon us.

10

Someone who was wrestling with faith-doubt questions asked you, "What was Jesus doing on the cross?" how would you answer?



Living the Word

One man has to die for all people because there is not one person who is righteous. God has to turn strength into weakness, and wisdom into folly, because human strength and wisdom do not allow a "poverty of spirit." Those who are "rich in spirit" cannot follow God's Holy Spirit in the ways of the kingdom.

But, those who are "poor in spirit" see Christ in all people: in those in need (25:31-45), and in those who give (7:7-11; Luke 10:25-37).

Some Christians have trouble giving, especially if they are holding onto money and possessions for a sense of security. Others find it difficult to receive freely, and feel a need to repay. The first group misses seeing Jesus in others; the second misses seeing Jesus freely giving himself to them.

If you have begun a journal, add entries for this session; and in the weeks ahead, look around you for opportunities to give—and receive—freely. Give thanks to God for these opportunities.

Looking Ahead

From a guarded tomb, Christ is risen. We are sent out to make disciples of all nations. Read Matthew 27:62—28:20 in preparation for Session 5.

The Rev. Judith VanOsdol-Hansen is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois. The Rev. Robert LaRiviere is pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Schoenersville, PA.

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To complement this study, a resource book supplies helpful background commentary (\$3.95, code 2-9225; order in quantities desired for group members), and a leader guide with step-by-step guidance for leaders (\$3.50, code 2-9226; order one for each leader). Also available as part of the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America "Blessing" theme are "Daily Bible Readings" with Scripture suggestions for every day of the year (\$1.95/12; \$13.95/100, code 2-9238; order in quantities desired).

This Is What You Did . . .

Margaret Brazell

Remember me? I asked "What Will You Do?" —when you find out that I carry the AIDS virus. [See the March 1992 LWT.—ED.] For a full year and a half I wondered about this, sharing my burden with only my family and a few friends.

I clutched at my secret as if it were a handful of feathers, forever glancing around to see if any had escaped into the winds of gossip. A feather clutcher: that's what I had become, and I didn't like it. People would routinely ask, "How are you?" and I lied like a pro, saying, "Fine." I was a lying feather clutcher. It was like living in prison . . . and I was my own warden.

Then I heard a gentle, otherwise sensitive person make a silly remark about AIDS, as if, since we know no one who has the virus, it is fair material for humor. This event alone, more than anything else, helped me decide it was time to shatter the idea that AIDS doesn't affect "us." If this illness could happen to me, it could happen to any person in my community.

I became infected with the virus from a blood transfusion following a car accident. If driving on State Highway 79 is a risk factor for AIDS, then we are all in trouble. I decided that perhaps it would be easier on those who will find themselves in my situation if I were to break the news that AIDS is here and lives in me.

So when people would ask me how I was, I began telling them that I'm not fine at all. I told them how I came to have this virus and how I am coping. The feathers flew out of my open hand; I never saw them again and have not missed them.

I wondered what you would do when I made my illness public knowledge. This is what you did.

You hugged me.

I should have known you would. Some of you had never hugged me in all the years I've known you, and it turns out you are very good at it. The arms go around me and pull me tightly to you. The love flows into me with radiant warmth and it feels so fine. I need this. Your actions do not stop with hugs, but these I cherish the most.

You prayed for me. Over and over I hear sincere assurances that you pray for healing and continued good health for me. You pray that researchers will be blessed with answers to the puzzle of the virus so that better treatments can be found.

I am not alone. My Christian friend in Germany prays for me with a group of nuns she joins for a retreat, and my Muslim foreign-exchange daughter in Turkey prays, too. God has not turned a deaf ear to our pleas. People around me get colds and flu, coughing and sneezing in my presence, yet I am the one who stays well. What I thought were symptoms of the virus turned out to be allergies. News of effective AIDS medication and vaccines that will help boost an already infected immune system sound like beautiful music to me. My doctor reminds me that I need not be cured of this virus in order to live a full life; after all, they don't cure diabetes either, and people live with it. I am living with HIV.

You encouraged me.

You told me to hang in there, not to give up. You save newspaper clippings explaining new treatments and hopes for people living with AIDS. You told me that the virus would not change anything between you and me. You asked if you could do anything. I said, "Pray."

You suffered with me. The most eloquent among you hugged me firmly and then, amid tears, said just three words: "That's the pits." That's all you needed to say. When you've said it all, there is no need to say more. In fact, many of you didn't even say three words but you were eloquent, too. I saw the love in your eyes.

You cared for me. You brought me delicious soup, made with love and a few cloves, just the way your mama made it and the way she taught you to care for your neighbor. Your mama would be proud. I feel that every loving thing you do is really God's love flowing through you to me. God doesn't sit aloof in heaven and

zap love to us; God sends it through you and your soup.

You let me hold your babies. Your children aren't afraid to wrap their arms around me. What love you have been spreading in their hearts! Of all the fears that broke my heart in the 18 months of my self-imprisonment, the worst was expecting that I would not be able to touch my favorite little ones. I thought my life as I knew it was over forever, but I was wrong; it got better than ever.

You don't seem to be afraid of catching the virus from me. If you were, you wouldn't come to my house for supper, or invite me to yours. My hot dish at the potluck seems to disappear with the rest. You've learned about the virus, and this knowledge helps you help me. Your lack of fear of me makes me feel like a person after all. I thought I'd turn from "regular person" to "AIDS victim" as soon as the news hit your ears, but you still seem to think of me as just me. Thanks.

You extended to my family the same support and love you've given me. They were another reason I spoke out. My family was my support group, but they needed a support group of their own. You are it.

We still don't know why this virus

struck me, or why any bad thing happens to anyone. I've quit trying to figure it out, because I don't need to know why. I simply trust in the Lord with all my heart and try not to lean on my own understanding. My own understanding is confused and frightened. If I focus on the gravity of this situation, I am like one who is afraid of heights; if I look down, I falter and fall. If I look to the Lord and trust in him either to provide a medical treatment, or to see us all through what is to come, I am not afraid.

I wrote "What Will You Do?" under the name Jackie Pine. She wrote about fearing rejection and the pain of bearing a burden privately. This article carries my real name. I write to give hope to all who carry their loads alone, thinking that no one will understand and care. God cares and so do you. ■

Margaret Brazell and her husband Bill live and work on their ranch in western South Dakota. They have one daughter, Bonnie.



Welcome Me Back

Patrick R. Keifert

Not long ago, I was preaching in a parish in the Los Angeles area. During the sermon, I explicitly addressed those who might be returning to the house of the Lord or visiting for the first time. At the end of the service, as I joined the pastors in greeting people as they left the church, I asked those whom I thought to be strangers—because of their body language during the service—whether they were indeed visitors. Most were.

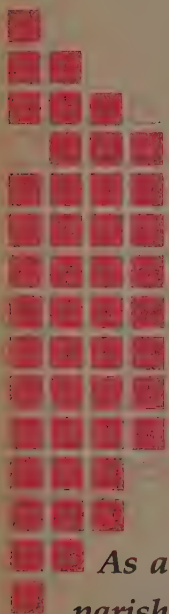
One woman, standing with her husband and teenage daughters, readily identified all of them as first-time visitors. Her husband, a very large man with a bushy, long beard and long hair, threw his arms around me and said through his tears, "I have not been in church in 22 years. Today you welcomed me back."

What was true on that "ordinary" Sunday is especially true on holidays like Easter and Christmas. Holidays are often the time

when people who seldom enter the house of the Lord return to it.

As a parish pastor I often secretly dreaded all these strange holiday prodigals quietly wondered why they bothered to come at all. When we planned services, especially for Easter, I often thought like the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. It irritated me that I would have to put aside my hard-won liturgical innovations to host a traditional feast for these long-lost persons. That we would have to use very simple liturgies to accommodate these prodigal cultural Christians.

Now that I take my place in the pews, I hurry my family along on holidays so we can get to the church early, get the best parking place, and avoid the traffic jams caused by strangers trying to find the church they visited last year. When we are there, we hear members mock wonder ask where these people came from.



As a parish pastor I often secretly dreaded all these strange holiday prodigals.

with many others in the church, we feel as if our home is being invaded and our security alarms are going off.

We all know that our irritation and sense of being invaded is wrong. The Scriptures are filled with the command to welcome strangers; indeed, we know that Christians should not act like the elder brother at the return of the prodigal.

We know we should expect and welcome strangers; reserve the best parking spaces for them; strategically place signs to bathrooms, worship space, nursery and the church office for first-time visitors; keep an eye out to help persons who look new or confused by their surroundings; offer to give rides to persons who otherwise might not be able to attend; prepare worship services that are "user-friendly"; write worship bulletins that clearly and simply explain what is to take place in worship; greet the visitors in our pew . . . the list could go on and should.

Needless to say, we quite often do not welcome strangers. Sometimes, we ourselves are just too busy working, and often failing, to worship. Other times, we do not even see these strangers. The spouse of the bishop of an Evangelical Lutheran church in America synod admitted that she has read every bulletin board in every church she and her husband have visited, because

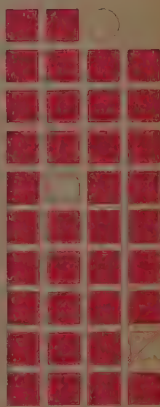
until she is formally introduced as the bishop's spouse, almost nobody notices her.

Like the prodigal's elder brother, however, we have a more serious problem than lack of vision. We need to have a new heart, a new will and a new mind. We need to look at our church—especially on Christmas and Easter—as the Lord's house, a home where all those entering, including us, are dependent upon the Lord's hospitality. In short, we have the same desperate need as these visitors have—to be welcomed by the one who came as a stranger in a stable in Bethlehem. The one for whom there was no room in the inn.

We need to be greeted by the one whose coming to his own people through death and resurrection frightened even the most faithful. For without a new heart, will and mind, we will not welcome these strangers or celebrate their return to the house of the Lord. ■

Dr. Patrick Keifert teaches at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary and the School of Law at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He and his wife, Jeanette, a family physician, have three daughters. He is the author of the forthcoming book Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism (Fortress, 1992).

*We
know we
should
expect
and
welcome
strangers.*



Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

♦ **Lutherans study Middle East peace process**

Well over a year since the Persian Gulf war, the Middle East is still struggling to find peace. Lutheran Peace Fellowship, (4329 Tokay Blvd., Madison, WI; 608/238-8223) has Gulf Resource Packets available for study at a cost of \$5.00 plus shipping and handling. Augsburg Fortress carries a 10-session study book and leader guide called *Two Peoples . . . The Same Land: A Study of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict* (study book, \$2.20, code 15-62307; leader guide, \$1.70, code 15-62308). Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom endorses an interdenominational network called Middle East Peace Makers that enables people to be "peacemakers in the context of their families, congregations, communities and countries." For an introductory membership, send \$10 to Middle East Peace Makers, P.O. Box 836, Teaneck, NJ 07666, or call 201/833-0525 for more information.

God of Love, grant peace to all families, congregations and countries.

♦ **Consider global ministry**

The ELCA Division for Global Mission invites interested people to consider long- and short-term opportunities to serve with overseas partner churches. Volunteers who provide their own financial support also are needed. Clergy and laity alike are needed for positions in such places

as Papua New Guinea, Japan, Senegal and Peru.

Risen Savior, open us to new possibilities of service.

♦ **Seminary focuses on rural renewal**

Wartburg Theological Seminary Dubuque, Iowa, is using a grant from its Rural Ministry Program to provide assistance to rural congregations. One goal is "to assist local rural communities in maintaining and revitalizing their quality of life," says Shannon Jung, program director. "Its aim is to support local decision making and to provide technical assistance whenever needed."

Eternal God, empower rural congregations as they serve you.

♦ **ELCA addresses public policy**

The ELCA addresses public policy issues through its Division for Church in Society and its Washington, D.C. Lutheran Office for Government Affairs. Pushing for health-care reform, the Washington office also speaks out on the plight of Haitian refugees, humanitarian aid to Iraq, gender-based crime and childhood hunger relief.

Gracious God, make us bold speak out for justice.

Remember to add to your daily prayer list people and issues in the news.

Sonia C. Groenewold is features editor of The Lutheran.

"Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. . . ."

Romans 1:20

Subtle Reminders

Margaret Hoppes

husband and I went a day visiting an old Spanish mission in California. As we toured the mission, we took pictures of the things we thought were the most beautiful and important. The statues, the crosses and the arch with its stained-glass windows and ornate

altar were inspiring. We walked through the courtyard and saw fountains and gardens. All these were put there by people to honor God.

I found a quiet, secluded corner of the courtyard. As I sat on a bench under some shade trees, I noticed a group of white lilies among the shrubs and stones. They were so pretty. I took a picture of them, not realizing what was really there. When the pictures were developed, I saw that the lilies were arranged in the form of a cross. In a small way, God showed me that he is always there, even if we do not see him. I realized that there are so many subtle reminders of God that we miss every day. Sometimes it is as simple as a kind word from a friend, or as



dramatic as a rainbow.

Sometimes we only see a small part of the big picture. I saw the lilies, but not the cross. We often fail to see the hidden surprises God puts in the big picture for us.

Now when I take a photograph, I look all around me, at the

details, to make sure I'm not overlooking anything. There might be something that God has put there for me, to lift my spirits, or to answer a prayer. I try to slow down, and spend more time looking for the gifts God has given, to see the subtle reminders of God's love always there.

Of all the pictures I took that day in the mission, this picture is my favorite. Everything else was put there by people to honor God; but that small, insignificant group of lilies, in the form of a cross, was put there by God, just for me! ■

Margaret Hoppes lives with her husband and young daughter in Marysville, California. An active volunteer, she enjoys photography as a hobby.



CLOWNING

with Victoria

Suzanne P. Sather

We started a clown ministry at our church. Five energetic young people came to our first four-hour workshop and, after some additional rehearsals, began performing. The youth involved are bright and imaginative. They explode with ideas. We hardly finish developing one skit before they sketch out another.

We diligently read through the six principles of clowning found in *Clown Ministry* by Floyd Shaffer and Penne Sewall (Group Books, 1984):

- 1** The word “clown” originally meant “clod.” A clown was a lowly sort of person who did the lowliest of tasks. . . .
- 2** The clown’s historic makeup is a symbol of death and resurrection. . . .
- 3** A historic clown axiom was based on the premise that “the most powerful person in the world is the one who can give away power.” . . .
- 4** God has a sense of humor; God laughs and delights. . . .
- 5** God is not always logical or rational by human standards. . . .
- 6** God works through the principles of comedy. In comedy there is the “bringing down” of someone and, through a non-heroic means, the person is lifted up higher and better than before. . . .



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I think there is one principle missing from this list: clowning is an event that leaves people—both performers and audiences—open to surprise. The clowns truly become vessels



*From left:
Jami Haskins,
Doug Jonson,
Jennifer Sather,
Alison Rygg,
Ryan Haskins,
Eric Christoferson
(front), Victoria
Sather*

through which the Holy Spirit can act. Perhaps an example can illustrate my point.

I have two daughters. Both are clowns. Jennifer, my 12-year-old, is a member of the clown troupe. She is a serious clown—idealistic, caring, committed. My 6-year-old daughter, Victoria, often tags along. Victoria is a lover, a hugger. She is an observer of life who cannot contain herself when delighted with something; she simply must try it out herself. She sings what she hears; she speaks as others speak; she dances, she runs, she plays “monster.” And, we have discovered, she mimes. This may all be related to the fact that she was born with Down syndrome, but I prefer to think not. I believe it is her gift to reflect back to us how she sees life.

One clown performance was at a convalescent center. We were excited about the chance to perform; the clowns, as usual, took their work quite seriously. As we put on makeup at a member’s house, we reminded the clowns that they may not speak once the whiteface is applied.

Victoria was amusing herself exploring a new house and watching the clowns. Then she appeared in her own clown suit! One of the mothers had found a suit just her size and had given her a red nose and a touch of makeup. As we rehearsed a new skit, she pulled on my sleeve and started mouthing words to me. She made no sounds.

As we started off for the center, some wondered what Victoria would do during the performance. I really hadn’t thought about it much, since she usually snuggles into someone’s welcoming lap. But the clowns agreed that, since she was in costume, Victoria could do her own part in the performance, though we had no idea what that would be!

A noteworthy thing about our clowns is the intensity with



Victoria Sather

which they perform. We do not have silly clowns, and we do not do slapstick. We make sure all our skits portray caring for others. The clowns demonstrate a simplicity that lets Christ shine through. Victoria reflects their commitment. She is quite a mimic. But she mimics more than just the actions. She mimics the expressions on faces, the rhythm, the very soul of the actions.

The clowns are willing to take risks. We rehearse in general, not in detail. They improvise their greetings to the audience before the performance and respond to the music that accompanies each skit. They make changes among themselves just before they go on, adjusting ideas and actions to their new thoughts. In each case their

performance is a joyful surprise—to themselves and to those watching. And when “mistakes” happen, the clowns forgive themselves, figure out what to do better, and plan for the next time.

How can I describe the performance that day? We perform one skit suggested in *Clown Ministry* in which a clown assumes the sins of the world by placing a series of dots on her face. The other clowns go to her and remove the dots to make her clean again. On that day, Victoria stood in line, hands clasped in front of her, devoutly waiting her turn to restore the clean whiteface to the fallen clown.

Later we performed our “Mustard Seed” skit, in which a clown becomes the seed that grows with seven days of watering. The other clowns wait off to the side so that when the seed is grown they can become the birds that nest in its branches. Victoria was right in the middle of the action, kneeling beside the tree watching it grow. Totally unaware of the audience, she watched every move as the tree grew, kneeling just two feet away so that she saw everything.

She is the watcher for each of us, having the courage to watch without inhibitions, without the sense of “properness” that often keeps us distant from each other. She enters into the action without hesitation or self-consciousness.

I don’t know if Victoria understands what she is doing. I do know that Victoria touches the places she visits and the people she knows. In that special place that the clowns create, in that time and space of adventure and serendipity, Victoria is a vessel through whom God chooses to speak. ■

Suzanne Sather is a playwright and provides family support to persons with disabilities. She lives in Stanwood, Washington, with her husband, Larry, and daughters.

Sharing Participation

na K. Solvang



the past two summers I've shared a week's vacation with a family that has young children. Last fall, as three-year-old Zachary was preparing for a weekend trip to our vacation spot, he announced to his parents, "The first thing I'm going to do when I get to the house is to look for Elna."

What a wonderful feeling to be looked for and expected! Zachary's eager anticipation opened my eyes to what shared participation is about: It's about *being expected*, *being missed* and *taking part*.

BEING EXPECTED.

"Increased participation" of individuals in the programs and leadership of the church is the goal of many Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations, synods, and churchwide strategies. It is also one of the goals of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women: strengthening "shared participation as women and men" in the ministries of the church and in society. To reach this goal, we need to examine our expectations about the mission of the church. We simply are not being faithful when we "divide up" the ministry work on the basis of age, gender or race. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not tied with pink or blue bows. Still, most of us have experienced in the church the separation of "women's work" and "men's work."

Sometimes this separation is formally spelled out: as who is eligible to vote at a congregational meeting and who can serve on the church council. But more often the separation comes out of expectations. We have come to expect that some people just don't take part in certain aspects of church work. In many congregations men

SHARED
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don't do altar care, youth don't read the lessons in worship and women don't usher. The faces of our leaders also tend to match our expectations, so we may easily overlook a talented but quiet member to chair a committee, skip over men for teaching positions, and rule out female candidates for pastor or bishop. We must remember, however, that God's Spirit is bound neither by our experiences nor our expectations.

BEING MISSED.

We need to ask ourselves whether we share God's eagerness in searching out the lost or forgotten, so that *every one* may participate in the blessings and tasks of God's mission.

As we make decisions, appoint committees and divide up tasks, are we aware of who is missing, overlooked or ruled out? Do we value God's missing treasures enough to announce we're going looking for Rhonda? Or Michael? Or Lily? Or Felipe? Do we *want* them to take part? Do we have confidence that we will be the richer in faith and ministry if they participate?

TAKING PART.

If "shared participation" is simply fitting new people into set ways of doing ministry, this goal will feel a bit like forcing a size-10 foot into a size-5 shoe. Increasing and sharing participation may change the ways of doing ministry, but it should not cramp ministry. The mission of the church is a size-10 mission! We are not being faithful when we attempt to undertake this mission with a smaller segment of the church's membership.

Scripture never suggests that shared participation is easy; individual differences and group disagreements are still to be reckoned with. Still, through Scripture, God teaches us to rejoice in shared participation. All the parables of Jesus searching and inviting end with community celebration and joy—because now every one is counted for, and able to take part in, the blessings of the mission at hand!

Shared participation is extending to one another the hospitality we have received from God. It means putting aside jealousy and selfishness to join with God and brothers and sisters in the homecoming celebration. It means recognizing other people's membership in the family, expecting them to take their place at the table, bring their unique gifts, and take full part in the life of the community. As little Zachary did for me, we can



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l to each other God's eagerness for each of us to be
ere with the rest of the family. ■

na Solvang is godmother to Zachary's brother Adam.
e works as director for education and training and
uty for administration in the ELCA Commission for
omen.

SHARING PARTICIPATION IDEAS:

◆ Survey who takes part on your congregation's committees and church council. Identify the "men only" and "women only" ministries. Plan to begin sharing these responsibilities. Consider that opening up participation may mean tasks are done differently and new participants may need training and support. For example, new ushers need more than offering plates to properly assume their responsibilities.

◆ Consider the youth of the congregation. Are they being taught to value their differing interests and abilities? Are they being equipped and encouraged to apply these gifts in the ministries of the congregation?

◆ Study the biblical foundations of shared participation of women and men. See "Study on Women and Men in the Body of Christ," available from the ELCA Distribution Service (800/328-4648) for \$2 (code 69-9794) plus postage and handling. Explore the history of your congregation and the roles women and men have taken in it over the years.

◆ See "A Cloud of Witnesses: Celebrating Lutheran Women's History," a how-to guide for congregations. Single copies are available free from the ELCA Resource Information Service (800/638-3522).

◆ Read about leadership styles and communication between women and men. See, for example, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* by Deborah Tannen (Ballantine, 1991).

◆ Encourage all committee members to share their thoughts, insights and experiences during group discussion and decision-making. ■

A WOMAN IN LABOR

Judith Mattison

"Wait a minute!" I said to myself. What kind of a metaphor is this? God like a woman in labor? How does that image fit? Is it that God gives birth? No, it isn't. We cannot take this passage out of its setting. Read what Isaiah says in chapter 42:14-16:

*"For a long time I have held my peace,
I have kept still and restrained myself;
now I will cry out like a woman in labor,
I will gasp and pant.
I will lay waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their herbage;
I will turn the rivers into islands,
and dry up the pools.
I will lead the blind
by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known
I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them."*

God is like a woman in labor when God cries out. That's it! In this passage, God ceases to be restrained and still. God sets free all the pent-up emotion held for so long, gasping and panting.

Our sin, our rebellion has caused this remarkable response by God. In this passage God's reaction to our sin is graphic. God may have been patient for a very long time, but no more. God virtually explodes with emotion and it is not pleasant for us. God promises to lay waste mountains and hills and to dry up all their plants. Rivers will dry up. This is judgment. We don't like it.

But the story does not end in judgment. Our God is a God of salvation. God promises to guide us from darkness into light, and from rough places to level ground. God has seemed to reach the limit with us, panting, gasping, crying out. And then, with mercy beyond our understanding, God says, "I will not forsake them." We are welcomed back into relationship by the God of salvation. ■

The Rev. Judith Mattison is associate pastor at Mount Olivet, Minneapolis, and the mother of two sons.

The News

Barbara Jurgensen

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Matthew 5:6

Laurie and her friend Nan were sitting on Laurie's patio soaking up the warm April sun.

"I really had everything a person could want," Laurie began, "but somehow I was still hungry for something—and I didn't know what.

Then came that day last October. I knew the news might not be good, I asked you to go with me to the doctor's office. After I listened to what the doctor had to say, then tried to make my way back to the waiting room, it was as if the floor were rising and falling under me. Six months! I sat there for a while, numb.

In the next few days I often thought of taking my own life so I wouldn't have to go through whatever was ahead of me. But every time I had such thoughts, the phone would ring and you'd be there for me. And you invited me to go to church on that Sunday. You told me how your faith had seen you through tough times. I thought, 'What do I have to lose?'

So I went with you. The opening words of the first lesson caught my attention: 'Seek the Lord and live' (Isaiah 55:6). And the words from the Psalm: 'So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom' (Psalm 90:12). Then the story in Mark about Jesus telling the

wealthy man to sell all he had and follow him really shook me. I realized that I was living for things, for possessions, and that they weren't much help to me with my final days.

"I went back to church with you the next Sunday, and the next, to hear more. Those talks we had as you drove me for treatments really helped. Finally I joined the adult instruction class and found myself a believer.

"I began to trust Jesus. His words are news that is good news. Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. I know I want to center my life in him.

"I don't know how much time I have left, but that's not the important thing. These last six months have been the best time of my life."

Laurie paused to look at Nan. "And you've been here for me. You stayed with me through that terrible day last October, and you've been here whenever I've needed you ever since. Most of all you've helped me find what I was hungry for. Thank you." ■

Barbara Jurgensen is an assistant professor of ministry and contextual education at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

Readers Celebrate LWT's 50th Issue

Sue Edison-Swift

Jesus Wept
Stories of Grief and Comfort
second in a series
Phyllis N. Kersten

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."
Matthew 5:4 King James Version

Over 180 individuals came to these circle meetings, and, on their own-unprompted Lutheran Women To-day call in November 1990 to tell the story of how these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount came true for them. The July/August 1991 LWT presented the first sampling of their responses.

In the midst of their mourning, they were comforted-by what friends, neighbors or relatives said, in person or over the phone. They were reassured by what people wrote-in long letters, short notes or on typewritten cards. They received comfort from poetry-sometimes original, sometimes a borrowed verse that had comforted another. And they were frequently comforted, they said, by actions that spoke louder than words.

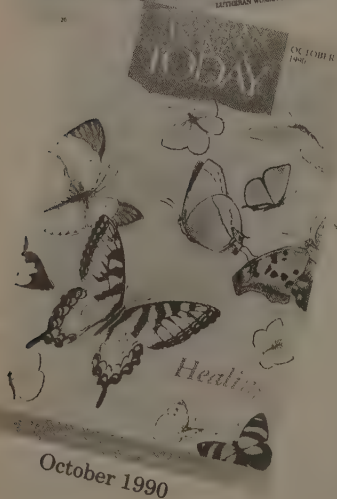
For example, a woman from Wisconsin told how her dear friend Shirley came to her door after her husband died and said, "I am yours for the day" and proceeded to take phone calls and help with arrangements.

Dorcas from Minnesota had a similar experience when her mother died. "She was my right arm in almost everything I needed. She was my right arm and unable to function at all." Dorcas explained, "but I was worth and unable to function properly." But then, a high school friend, came "not only with open arms and a listening ear but with a notebook with take notes and a listening ear" but with a notebook with take notes. She organized all of our scattered notes about food, flowers, arrangements.

"It was like some had dreams repeating itself,
telling someone who wasn't afraid to walk through it
I made it possible to endure."

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

OCTOBER 1991



October 1990

Lutheran Woman Today's October 1991 issue included a request that readers help celebrate LWT's 50th issue (this issue) by nominating a favorite article and cover. Despite the complaints from some who said, "I can't choose just one!" and a few who said, "If I ever read a favorite, I'll let you know," about 200 readers completed the short survey.

Who responded?

Almost all who responded are active. Women of the ELCA participated who use LWT for personal reading, group Bible study and for learning about the women's organization. Responses came from 25 states. Half the readers responding are over 40 years of age, half are younger. The oldest woman responding is 92, the youngest is 24.

Favorite articles

The hands-down survey favorite: the "Jesus Wept" series by Phyllis Kersten, in the July/August, September and October 1991 issues. Kersten's excerpted stories shared by LWT readers about their times of grief and comfort. Some survey comments about "Jesus Wept":

"I am thankful knowing there are still people who care and want to take time to comfort, listen and

st people in times of death and trouble."

"It touched my heart and helped me in my own grief."

"I like to hear how people reach out to show they care, so I can do likewise."

Other favorite articles include: "Does War Work?" by Lowell Erdahl and "Easter in October" by Carole Resheim (both from October 1991); "In" by Donald Juel and "The Lord's Prayer" by James Nestingen (both from July/August 1991). Eighty-three articles received at least one favorite nomination.

Can relate

Many explain their choice of a favorite by saying "I can relate." For example:

"Faithful Stewards: Cultivating Loving Relationships" by Anne Marie Nuechterlein, September 1991. "It speaks to me where I am. Helps me think through priorities for me and resources."

"Keep Coming Back," January 1991. "I experienced living with an alcoholic spouse. I know the pain."

"Those Who Have Ears to Hear, Let Them Hear" by Mary Pellauer, November 1988. "This article spoke to the issue of recovery from incest [an issue] I struggle with."

"Spirit, Thou Shalt Not Become Old," March 1988. "Edna Hong writes, 'Old age wrinkles the body. But, thanks be to God, the spirit in the crinkled body never needs ironing.' Since I am 70, I can relate. . . ."

Read it and weep

Another criterion for naming a favorite emerged from the comments: "It stirred me to tears . . ." one reader wrote about Karen Melang's article "The Guest" (October 1991). Another said that "Airport Encounter" by

Readers Celebrate!

Lynne Puttmann Santangelo (July/August 1990) "just made me cry and cry." Those who work on LWT have been moved to tears of joy or sorrow over articles as well. Some words are processed by the head, others by the heart.

Favorites old and new

We expected, and found, an "immediacy effect" in the nominations—articles and covers from recent issues were named most often. Most readers completed the survey just after the October 1991 issue was published.

Yet some readers remembered favorites from LWT's earliest issues, such as:

"Tied Together" by Barbara Lundblad, January 1988. "This set the theological framework for Women of the ELCA. . . ."

"Bad Organist, Happy Ending" by Carol Bly, February 1988. "This story has stayed with me, but there were many letters critical of it. Too bad: I would like more such parables."

Favorite covers

Five covers vied for the "most favorite cover" designation, including:

Flowers of the Field, January 1991. "It provides comfort and reassurance that we can put our trust in God's word."

Healing (Butterflies), October 1990. "The butterfly symbolism reminded me of Malachi 4:2: 'But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.'"

The Peaceable Kingdom (colored by children), October 1991. "Peace

Simonson, June 1990) shows that even though there are struggles of life, we can all maintain hope and live in our religious faith."

I am glad you address issues the times: child and woman abuse, national and world hunger, our responsibility as custodians of the earth."

"Women: Healing" (by Terry Wes, October 1990) and "its emphasis on God being with us and us weeping with us in tragedy is miraculously timely. . . . The whole issue spoke directly to me."

The whole July/August 1991 issue, *Believers as Theologians*, was a favorite. For the first time, women are presented with the idea that they are theologians. All articles are excellent, especially the one by Martin Marty."

The responses to the LWT survey suggest that older and younger women share many similar favorites, interests and concerns. Did you guess that comments 1, 3 and 5 are from older readers and comments 2 and 4 are from younger readers?

the way . . .

The brief survey asked for a favorite cover, article, and comments. Respondents generously offered ideas for the magazine, and thanked LWT for its ministry. Some readers took the opportunity to offer some constructive criticism. Here is a sampling of comments:

"I am on a remote mission field. I need LWT cover to cover and keep me up to date to discover some nugget I hadn't seen before."

"For the past three years due to differences between me and my church, I have not been as active as in past years. LWT has been the constant in these three years. Every

month I knew it would be the boost I needed and eventually bring me back to the church. I am once again ready to be an active church member. Thank you."

♦ "I didn't realize a cover was an important, major part of concern. Maybe more time and thought should go into the Bible study."

♦ "One can get something helpful in most every article, providing you're looking for it!"

♦ "LWT comes each month as a gaily-wrapped gift, and I can hardly wait to open it! I have never been disappointed!"

♦ "I liked the *Scope*. Copy it if you can. Of course, times have changed."

♦ "LWT has backed off from daily issues over the years. The first year was the best."

♦ "I like covers of real people instead of abstract drawings I can't understand."

♦ "In each and every issue there seems to be an article that is just what I need at that time—whether it is about a problem I have or some type of reassurance I need."

♦ "The articles remind me of my baptism gifts and responsibilities."

♦ "Please have less articles on social action. Lots of us are very busy raising young children. That's what God calls us to do *now*! Give us words of support and encouragement, not guilt that we should do even more."

♦ "Each cover makes me stop—think—make my own judgment on its meaning before I open the pages and read *your* meaning."

♦ "The quality of the magazine is excellent, and the covers are so creative and attractive. I like the idea of a theme for each issue. Make sure the articles have 'meat' to them and are not too simple. We need to think!"

(continued)

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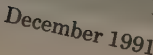
Karen McLary

The web of relationships spun by living with just three other people is amazingly complex and offers countless opportunities for conflict.

May 1991



LETTHERMAN WOMAN TODAY



Sue Edison-Swift is Lutheran World Today associate editor.

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FIFTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

the celebration begin!

March 1, 1992, Women of the ELCA began its Fifth Birthday Year celebrations with gatherings of women throughout the United States and Caribbean. The following program is being used at birthday events to recall the past joys and challenges of women's organizations and to look forward to carrying out the purpose statement of Women of the ELCA.

The kickoff events begin a year-long celebration. "Women of the ELCA: Gifted for Every Good Purpose," the theme of the Fifth Birthday Year, is being carried out in creative, caring and challenging ways. Throughout the year, women and congregational units across the church are making and carrying out plans to celebrate each other's ministries, hold special events, take on new ministries and support each other in a variety of ways. Birthday offerings will support the churchwide ministries of Women of the ELCA.

A "Birthday Bash," to be held at the Women of the ELCA Second Triennial Convention in Washington, D.C., in August 1993, will conclude Fifth Birthday festivities.

The program reprinted here is in the "Fifth Birthday Kit." The kit is sent to all ELCA congregations

in January, includes planning suggestions, celebration ideas, reproducible art for making your own prayer bookmarks and birthday offering envelopes, even fun luncheon ideas, all to spark your creative and celebrative plans for the Fifth Birthday of Women of the ELCA.

You may wish to use this program in a circle Bible study group, at general meetings of Women of the ELCA, at a Women of the ELCA luncheon with other congregations, at a retreat, or in personal devotions. Or discuss it section-by-section in small groups and then pray it together as a closing devotion. Read it on a Monday at noon when you join together with other Lutheran women to pray for the needs of the world. Make it a regular part of your women's organization's board or commit-



tee meetings. Add to it prayers of thanksgiving for the ministries of women in your congregation and pray it at Sunday worship. Use as is or adapt it for your needs . . . and have a good time celebrating Women of the ELCA.

Celebrating Women's Ministries: Thanking God for Every Gift

LEADER: "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 *Corinthians* 9:8)

These words from Scripture provide the framework for our celebration of God's activity in our lives—individually, as a community of women called Women of the ELCA, and as a Christian community. They are words of call and challenge, words of promise and hope.

READER 1: The Christian community **celebrates**. We celebrate the gifts of life: births and birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, resurrection and recreation. We celebrate the gifts of faith: baptism, communion, worship.

Why do we celebrate? Because God is good; because life is God's good gift.

How do we celebrate? We remember the past, we dream for the future. We place all our times—past, present, future—before God with thankfulness.

READER 2: Women of the ELCA is celebrating a 5-year anniversary.



Throughout 1992 and into 1993, we will remember the communities of women who served before. We will lift up with thankfulness the participants and ministries of Women of the ELCA. We will envision an organization that faces the challenges of the future and meets needs as God empowers us.

HYMN: "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry" (*Women of the ELCA Worship Resource Book*, p. 38) "Now Thank We All Our God" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 534).

LEADER: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven . . ." (*Ecclesiastes* 3:1)

ALL: Thank you, gracious God, for this time and place. Open our eyes to your goodness and our hearts to each other. Save us from the sins of ingratitude and indifference.

LEADER: "Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy!" (*Psalms* 47:1)

ALL: "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! . . . Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (*Mark* 11:9,10)

LEADER: Let us celebrate and praise God for the work of the gospel . . .

ALL: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: Let us pray for the ministries of the whole church, of those who serve in governments and institutions, in the high and lowly places . . .

L: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: For the ministries of women of the ELCA, in this congregation and throughout the church; for Bible study and resources that help us grow in faith and witness to the faith . . .

L: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: For quilts made with caring hands and sent to faraway places; for letters sent to Washington, D.C., for shoulders to cry on and arms that embrace, for all ministries of service, advocacy and action . . .

L: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: For support of leaders and volunteers . . .

L: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: For the One in Christ and man to Woman programs that help women of diverse cultures flourish together . . .

L: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ADER: For literacy efforts so that all may read God's Word, for teachers and trainers, for opportunities to build confidence and education . . .

ALL: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

LEADER: For circles and parenting groups, for caregivers and caretakers, for ecumenical efforts, for nurture of our Christian communities . . .

ALL: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

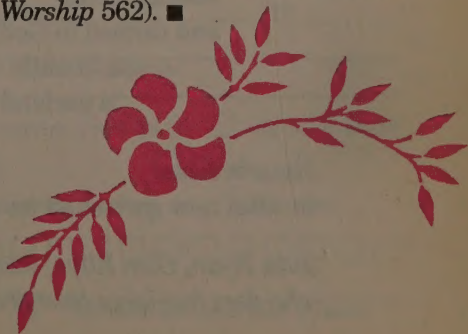
LEADER: For the stewardship of women's time, talents, possessions and of self. For the stewardship of the earth . . .

ALL: Thank you, gracious God, for every gift.

ALL: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the work of Women of the ELCA and the ministries of women throughout the church. *(Here additional prayers may be included for specific ministries of Women of the ELCA participants in your congregation, cluster/conference, or synodical women's organization.)* Christ Jesus, bless our ministries for your service.

LEADER: Thanks be to God for every good and abundant gift! Amen.

HYMN: "Song of Commitment" (*Women of the ELCA Worship Resource Book*, p. 32) or "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 562). ■



Celebrate the Feast

Julie Eileen Ryan

New clothes.

In prosperous times, an entire outfit.

In leaner years,

perhaps only a pair of stockings,
or adornment for the hair.

But—something new.

Something new is of the essence
to set this day apart.

“... some women of our group astounded us,”
said the disciples to the stranger along the Emmaus road.

“They had indeed seen a vision of angels
who said that he was alive” (Luke 24:22-23).

Something new!

Something new carpets the earth, decks each branch—
and even Solomon in all his glory
knew no clothing such as this.

As the very lilies unfurl in garments of celebration,
so also do we.

Something new: to celebrate our passage
out of bondage into freedom,
out of death into everlasting life.

Baptized into Christ's death,
we emerge—

washed clean

and clothed in God's Easter finery of grace:

a “mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit,”
“a garland instead of ashes” (Isaiah 61:3).

Jesus is risen!

In what new garb shall we celebrate the feast? ■

*Julie Ryan, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, is a pastor on leave from call
who does free-lance liturgical art and writing.*

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"Are you Saved?"

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Ministry in Daily Life
A Human Being, Not a
Human Doing
The "D" Words of Discipleship
The Study of Ministry

July/August:

YOUNG WOMEN

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